

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: The Nexus between Female Employment, Child Abuse, and Crime

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Abstract

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory posits that individuals possess a set of hierarchical needs, ranging from basic physiological necessities to higher-order needs such as love, esteem, and self-actualization. This study investigates the nexus between female employment, child abuse, unmet needs, and subsequent criminal behaviour through the lens of theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Our hypothesis suggests that child abuse disrupts the fulfilment of these needs at various developmental stages, potentially leading to adverse outcomes like juvenile delinquency and adult criminal behaviour. This study reviews previous studies on factors contributing to child abuse, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, including female employment, reported child abuse cases, and crime statistics. The findings are discussed within the context of Maslow's hierarchy to comprehend how the disruption of fundamental needs can impede psychological development and elevate the risk of future criminal behaviour. This study enhances the global understanding of child abuse by demonstrating the applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in elucidating the nexus between early childhood experiences and later criminal behaviour. The findings emphasize the necessity for comprehensive policies that ensure the fulfilment of children's needs at all levels of Maslow's hierarchy. By addressing the root causes of child abuse and fostering healthy development, it is possible to break the cycle of violence and diminish the risk of future criminal behaviour on a global scale.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Crime, Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs, Female Employment

Introduction

In recent years, women are getting the opportunity to obtain higher levels of education and career advancement. The advancement of knowledge and technology has significantly boosted the labour sector, regardless of status and gender. Women's involvement in various

aspects of national development cannot be disputed anymore. Almost every sector whether economic, social, law, education, politics, medicine, security, administration, trade and so on has been ventured by women. In addition, most female today have realized their potential in strengthening both the family and the national economy. Therefore, female's abilities are now proven to be almost equal to men's except from a physical point of view. This scenario is different compared to the life of women in the past who were often associated with the responsibility of managing the family and household only. Nevertheless, no matter how high their rank and career status, the responsibility towards family remains a priority.

It is notable that knowledgeable individuals can foster a society with high-level thinking and good behaviour. Similarly, educated and working women will not only be able to contribute to the development of the country's economy, employment and household economy, but will also nurture well-mannered and knowledgeable individuals. This is because a good education for children starts at home. However, support and encouragement from society in general and family in particular is very necessary for career women to maintain a good and harmonious balance between family and work. Otherwise, negative situations may arise for working women because women have various identities within households, they are daughters, wives and mothers (co-parenting or alone) among others. These identities are intertwined with ideas about the role of women in the household, and what societies and families expect of them. This is also the cause of pressure on career women. Working women are trapped in a "double-burden syndrome" where they are required to manage domestic duties and care for their children, elderly parents, or other family members (Salleh & Mansor, 2022).

The pressure faced can negatively impact the quality of work and family life, especially for children. Children may not only be neglected due to their mother's busy schedule but even worse, they may become victims of abuse by their own mother. Child abuse is a global issue with severe lifelong consequences. It includes various forms such as physical, emotional, neglect, and sexual abuse. Globally, 1 in 2 children aged 2-17 year experience some form of violence each year, with up to 1 billion children aged 2-17 having experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year (Unicef, 2020). Child abuse is everywhere, yet it remains as under-represented as any other part of the world. Reported cases are only a small fraction compared to unreported ones. In fact, anyone has the potential to abuse children. Usually, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect are perpetrated by someone in a caregiving role. When the abuser is a stranger, it is considered a criminal assault. Most offenders are the parents of the victims (Pro, 2022). This is highly concerning as those who are supposed to provide love and care becomes the perpetrators. If this issue is not addressed promptly, it will have lifelong impacts on the victims, such as physical and mental health problems, poorer school performance, and difficulties in employment and relationships. undeniably, child abuse can hinder the economic and social development of the country.

Addressing the urgent issue of child abuse necessitates immediate and effective interventions by all relevant authorities. Extensive research has investigated this pervasive problem, however the relationship between female labour force participation (FLFP), child abuse, and subsequent criminal behaviour remains underexplored, particularly within the theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943)'s hierarchy of needs,

a foundational theory in psychology, outlines a pyramid of human needs ranging from basic physiological requirements to higher-order needs for self-actualization. This study posits that child abuse disrupts the fulfilment of these needs at various developmental stages, potentially increasing the risk of juvenile delinquency and adult criminal involvement. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been found adapting Maslow's framework to elucidate this issue. Therefore, this research aims to explain the ways through which FLFP may directly or indirectly contribute to child abuse, and how unmet needs in childhood can lead to criminal behaviour.

Literature Review: Female Labour Force Participation, Child Abuse, and Crime

Determinants of Child Abuse

The growing body of literature on the determinants of child abuse highlights the seriousness of this prevalent social problem. Numerous socioeconomic determinants have been investigated as contributor to child abuse, with mixed findings. Wong et al. (2009) examined the roles of individual-, family- and community-level factors such as socioeconomic status (SES) in determining the likelihood of child physical abuse in Guangzhou, China. Their findings showed that mother's higher occupational and educational status remained significantly independent predictors of physical abuse. Besides, many studies clearly imply that economic resources play an important role in influencing risk for child abuse and particularly child neglect (Berger & Waldfogel, 2011). In Malaysia, Yob et al (2022), revealed a relationship between socioeconomic factors and reported child abuse cases. In the long run, unemployment, inflation, and economic growth significantly influence child abuse rates, while divorce and poverty do not demonstrate a similar finding. Conversely, short-term analysis indicates that divorce, economic growth, and unemployment positively correlate with child abuse cases, whereas poverty exhibits a significant negative correlation. These findings suggest that family stress arising from economic and social difficulties, coupled with inadequate coping mechanisms, may be key contributors to child abuse in Malaysia.

In contrast, Shaari et al (2022), empirically examined the impact of macroeconomic fluctuations such as inflation, unemployment, and economic growth on the incidence of child abuse in Malaysia. They used time series data spanning from 1988 to 2017 and employed an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) modelling framework. Their findings revealed no significant long-term association between these macroeconomic variables and child abuse. However, in the short run, a noteworthy relationship emerges, indicating that these economic factors significantly contribute to child maltreatment within Malaysia.

However, Shaari et al (2015), employed the Johansen cointegration test and revealed there is a long-run equilibrium relationship between inflation, unemployment, and child abuse rates. Specifically, the vector error correction model (VECM) analysis indicated that an increase in the unemployment rate has a positive and statistically significant impact on the child abuse rate in both the short and long run. The Granger causality test further confirmed a unidirectional causal relationship running from unemployment to child abuse, suggesting that changes in unemployment precede and influence changes in child abuse. However, the analysis does not find a similar causal relationship between inflation and child abuse.

For decade, much of the research has centred primarily on the relationship between FLFP and economic growth, often overlooking the potential social consequences, particularly for

children. A very limited number of studies have directly investigated the relationship between FLFP and child abuse. For instance, Shaari et al. (2019) found that FLFP increased the number of child abuse in Malaysia, suggested that an increase in FLFP increased the potential negative impacts on child well-being, including the risk of abuse and neglect, have received comparatively less attention. This situation is supported by Paul (2014) and Shaari et al. (2019) who mentioned that the multiple roles for working women and lack of spousal support led to increased parental stress that causes child abuse.

Child Abuse and Crime

The detrimental impact of child abuse on an individual's well-being and development has been extensively documented in the literature. Numerous studies have established a strong relationship between childhood maltreatment and an increased risk of engaging in criminal behaviour later in life. Currie and Tekin (2006), revealed that experiencing child abuse approximately doubles a person's chances of engaging in criminal activities. They stated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are not only more vulnerable to maltreatment but also suffer harmful consequences. They added that boys are likelihood to commit crimes after experiencing maltreatment compared to girls. Similarly, Jung et al. (2017) found a correlation between childhood maltreatment and both internalizing and externalizing behaviours in elementary school children, regardless of gender. However, gender-specific patterns emerge in predicting adult criminality. They explained that internalizing behaviours in males decrease, and externalizing behaviours in females do not predict adult crime. Furthermore, Haapasalo and Moilanen (2004) stated that individuals with a history of childhood physical abuse demonstrated a heightened likelihood of reporting involvement in violent crimes during young adulthood. In contrast to Lee et al. (2015) who tested 297 participants adults from early childhood, and they revealed that childhood physical and emotional abuse indirectly predicted adult crime for both genders through childhood/adolescent antisocial behaviour and adult social influences.

Given the scarcity of research specifically examining the relationship between FLFP, child abuse, and subsequent criminal behaviour through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this study aims to fill this critical gap. By applying Maslow's framework, we seek to elucidate the mechanisms through which unmet needs in childhood, potentially exacerbated by female employment, can contribute to negative outcomes such as delinquency and criminal behaviour. This research will not only contribute to the existing literature on child abuse but also shed light on the potential long-term consequences of FLFP, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners working to protect children and promote their well-being.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Child Abuse-Crime Nexus

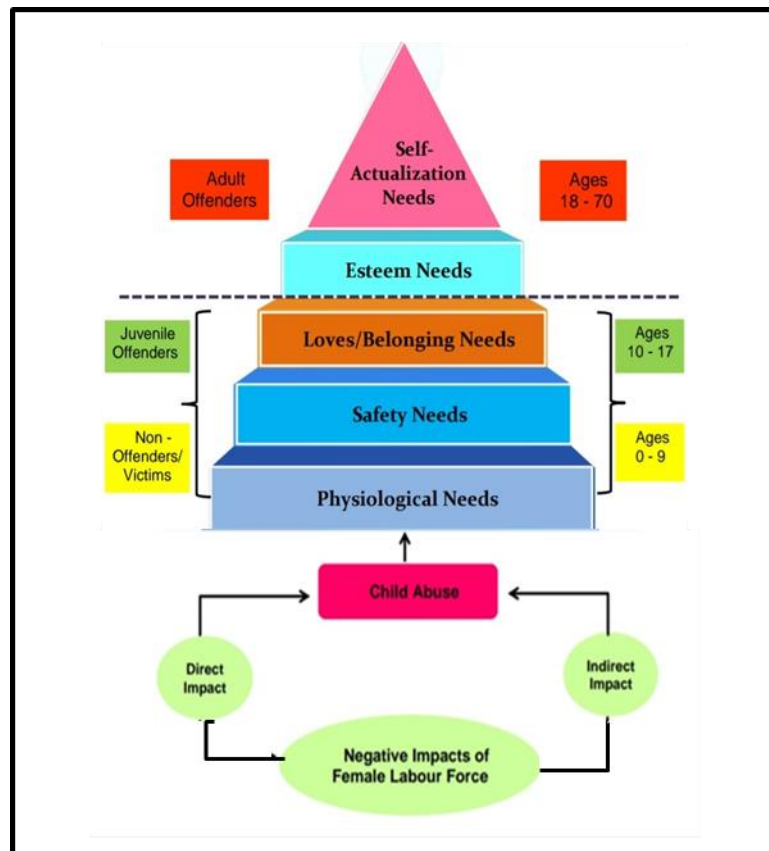


Fig. 1. The impacts of Child abuse on Crime: A Conceptual Framework using Maslow's hierarchy of needs Theory

Figure 1 explains that an increase in female labour force participation (FLFP) can contribute to a rise in child abuse through two primary ways: direct abuse by the mother and indirect abuse resulting from inadequate care provided by others. This complex issue reveals how shifts in labour dynamics can have far-reaching implications on family structures and child welfare. In a case of direct abuse by the mother probably due to the increased pressures and responsibilities associated with balancing work and family life. This may result in higher levels of stress and frustration, which can sometimes manifest as direct abuse towards the children. Mothers who are overburdened by work demands may lack the emotional and physical energy to provide the necessary care and nurturing, leading to instances of neglect or abuse.

Meanwhile, indirect impact of FLFP on child abuse happens as mothers are engaged in the labour force, children may be left in the care of other individuals who may not provide adequate supervision or care. This can lead to situations where children are neglected or subjected to abuse by these caregivers. Inadequate care might also mean insufficient emotional support and supervision, increasing the likelihood of children experiencing neglect or exposure to harmful environments. Theoretically, child abuse or neglect can have harmful effects to the development of children. Based on the figure 1, the findings show that the

effects of child abuse on children development can be explained through the level of age and needs stated by Maslow as followings:

Ages 0-9: When children are abused or neglected during these formative years, their physiological and safety needs are not met. This early deprivation can result in physical and psychological trauma, making them vulnerable to negative influences from their peers and environment. These children might struggle with developmental delays, emotional instability, and a lack of trust in others, setting a foundation for future behavioural issues. However, the children at this age level are called victims instead of offenders because children under the age of 10 years old are not deemed to be criminally responsible for their actions (Child Act, 2021).

Ages 10-17: As children grow older, the compounded effect of unmet physiological, safety, and love/belonging needs becomes more pronounced. Adolescents who experience abuse or neglect during this critical developmental period may feel isolated, unloved, and unsafe. This lack of fundamental needs can drive them to seek attention and a sense of belonging through criminal activities, leading to their classification as juvenile offenders. Engaging in criminal behaviour may be perceived to gain respect, attention, or a semblance of control in their lives. At this level of age, when a court order is issued, the juvenile is placed in a Probation Hostel (PH) or Approved School (AS) for a mandatory three-year period, irrespective of their individual progress or rehabilitation. In cases where a juvenile absconds from a PH or AS and is subsequently apprehended, they can be transferred to a Henry Gurney School (HG), which falls under the jurisdiction of the prison system (Child Act, 2021).

Moreover, the long-term consequences are worrisome. Upon their release from juvenile detention, these young individuals often face significant challenges in reintegrating into society. They may encounter societal stigma, rejection, and a lack of opportunities, which further diminishes their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. This societal rejection reinforces the negative self-perceptions formed during their childhood and adolescence, making it difficult for them to break free from the cycle of criminal behaviour. This situation will lead them to transit to adult criminal behaviour. The persistent failure to meet their esteem needs and the ongoing societal rejection can lead these individuals to continue engaging in criminal activities as adults. This behaviour becomes a coping mechanism to deal with their unmet needs and the continuous challenges they face in society. As adult offenders, they may find themselves trapped in a cycle of crime and punishment, with little hope of achieving self-actualization or fulfilling their potential. This conceptual framework effectively illustrates the pro-found impact that increased female labour force participation can have on child abuse rates and, consequently, on crime rates. It highlights the intricate relationship between unmet needs during childhood and adolescence and the propensity for criminal behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study explains the complex relationship between female labour force participation (FLFP), child abuse, and subsequent criminal behaviour through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The findings emphasize that while FLFP offers numerous benefits to women and families, it can also create challenges in fulfilling children's basic needs, potentially increasing the risk of abuse and neglect. When children's basic needs for safety, security, love, and belonging are not met, as highlighted in the lower tiers of Maslow's

hierarchy, they may be more vulnerable to negative influences and engage in delinquent or criminal activities to cope with their unmet needs or seek a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the study reveals the long-term consequences of child abuse, particularly for those who experience it during adolescence, where unmet needs for love, belonging, and esteem can further propel them towards criminal behaviour. The persistent failure to satisfy these needs throughout childhood and adolescence can culminate in a cycle of criminal behaviour that extends into adulthood, as individuals continue to grapple with the psychological and emotional scars of their early experiences.

These findings stress the need for comprehensive policies and interventions that address the root causes of child abuse and support working mothers in balancing their work and family responsibilities. Affordable and accessible child-care, family-friendly workplace policies, and social safety nets are essential for mitigating the potential negative impacts of FLFP on child well-being, thus ensuring the fulfilment of children's basic needs. Furthermore, early intervention and rehabilitation programs for children who have experienced abuse are crucial for preventing future criminal behaviour and fostering an environment where children can thrive and reach their full potential, as envisioned in the higher tiers of Maslow's hierarchy. Although this study has achieved its aims, there were still inevitable constraints. Firstly, future research should delve deeper into the relationship between FLFP, specific types of child abuse (physical, emotional, neglect), and different forms of criminal behaviour. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the long-term trajectories of children who experience abuse in the context of female employment. Additionally, to gain lived experiences of families navigating the complexities of work and child-rearing, qualitative research can offer valuable insights. Interviews and focus groups with working mothers, fathers, and caregivers can shed light on the challenges and strategies they employ to ensure their children's needs are met. These qualitative findings can complement and enrich quantitative data, offering a better understanding of the interconnection between FLFP, child abuse, and crime. By understanding these complexities, we can create a society where children are protected, nurtured, and empowered to achieve self-actualization.

This research makes significant contributions to both theoretical frameworks and the contextual understanding of the relationship between Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP), child abuse, and subsequent criminal behaviour. By integrating Maslow's hierarchy of needs into the analysis, this study offers a novel approach to understanding how unmet needs during childhood exacerbated by increased FLFP can lead to adverse outcomes, including delinquency and criminal behaviour. This theoretical contribution bridges a gap in existing literature, which has predominantly focused on economic determinants while overlooking the psychological and developmental impacts of FLFP on children. Contextually, the research highlights the unique socio-economic dynamics, where rising FLFP intersects with traditional family roles, creating a complex environment that can heighten risks for child abuse. By shedding light on these contextual factors, this study not only advances scholarly discourse but also provides valuable insights for policymakers in designing targeted interventions that address the root causes of child abuse in the context of increasing female workforce participation.

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